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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 001576

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON GG AM RU

SUBJECT: KOCHARIAN-SAAKASHVILI "UNOFFICIAL MEETINGS"

Classified By: Ambassador John M. Evans for reasons 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) On August 21, Armenian President Robert Kocharian hosted Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili at his summer residence on Lake Sevan for what Armenian press characterized as an "informal" visit. Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarksian and his Georgian counterpart Irakly Okruashvili also attended. The two presidents met for similar "unofficial" discussions at a Georgian ski resort in April 2005.

¶2. (C) Presidential spokesman Viktor Soghomonian, who traveled with Kocharian to Sevan, declined to discuss specifics but told us "press reports are accurate." Previous meetings between the two leaders, Soghomonian said, usually focus on economic cooperation -- particularly transit of Armenia's imports and exports through Georgia -- and Georgia's largely ethnic Armenian Javakheti region.

¶3. (SBU) In an August 19 press conference, Kocharian told reporters that an article published by the Russian Nezavisimaya Gazeta titled "Kocharian Betrays Russia" was the "fruit of the morbid and limited imagination of the author." Kocharian reportedly down-played similar stories in Armenian opposition newspapers Aravot and Haykakan Zhamanak and denied that his meeting with the Georgian President had "anti-Russian implications."

¶4. (SBU) Kocharian's official website (www.president.am) posted the following statement after the visit:

Begin text of statement as published (original in English):

On August 21-22, President of Georgia Michael Saakashvili made an unofficial visit to Armenia.

Michael Saakashvili and Robert Kocharian discussed issues related to the Armenian-Georgian relations and current socio-economic situation in Javakhk at the summer residence of the President of Armenia on the Sevan Lakeshore.

At the briefing with journalists President of Armenia said that leaders of the neighboring states should meet more than once during the year. Those meetings can be official or unofficial. The very fact that we are conducting not only official but also friendly contacts with Georgia is a very good sign. "I think that relations of the Presidents will have their impact on the relations of common people. relations between the people of the two states can be established through contacts, reciprocal visits, tourism, business and common interest -- all this should be reestablished. It is not possible to do it in one or two days, however it is possible to ruin it in one or two days. We must preserve and cherish the relations that have been built through the generations and do our best to develop them further," stressed President Kocharian. In the President's opinion the fact that many Armenians spend their vacation in Georgia and return with good feelings is also a good sign.
End Text.
EVANS